The most important aspect of any relationship—personal, casual, or professional—is communication. Personal communication usually happens between family and friends and can be anything from a face-to-face conversation, a text message exchange, or even personal journal writing. Personal communication can be extremely intense, but it’s often casual, although casual communication also includes interaction with people who are not our family or friends. The focus of this article, however, is professional and business communication, which involves interaction with those we work with, whether we have a close relationship with them or not.

Any spoken or written interaction that represents you to your coworkers and/or supervisors or represents your workplace is professional communication. It requires close attention to detail with regard to wording, the intended reader’s perspective, and the desired outcome of the message—in other words, you don’t want to offend or alienate the person you’re communicating with, especially if you need their cooperation, and most especially if they have authority over you. Professional communication often occurs within the culture of a particular workplace or industry and so may reflect the particular expectations and idiosyncrasies of that company. For a medical transcriptionist, examples of professional communication may include emails to QA regarding a detail in a medical report or to a supervisor to discuss a raise.

Many of us have trouble getting our point across effectively, and there’s often anxiety surrounding professional communication. Here are some common pitfalls and possible solutions:

Communication paralysis. When anxiety and writing or speaking combine, some of us become paralyzed, stumbling over words or staring at a blank page unable to begin. After trying for a while, the stress of the situation begins to pale in comparison to the stress of trying to express your thoughts, and you decide to forget it—at least for awhile. After this happens a couple times, you stop trying, you don’t discuss the problem that’s causing your frustration, and you don’t get the raise you deserve because no one knows you’re even looking for one.

This one is tough to overcome because it’s most likely rooted in fear—fear of admitting we are upset, fear of being wrong, fear of authority, etc. It’s important to overcome this paralysis, however, because the alternative is to not communicate at all, which accomplishes nothing. If this rings a bell, try to pinpoint why communication paralysis seizes you. Once you know what you’re afraid of you can examine and conquer it.

Continued on pg. 8
Fall is here again! Maybe it’s something wired into us from a lifetime of associating autumn with the start of school, or maybe it’s just that we may have a little more time available because the kids are in school all day, but for lots of us the falling leaves bring a renewed commitment to educational goals.

All year we have been exploring the theme of professionalism, and in this issue we’ve focused on professionalism in communication. Common communication pitfalls and expectations are addressed in the main features, including From a Grader’s Perspective. Communication is the common thread found in the full complement of shorter features, including Dear Susan, Mixed Media, Finders Keepers, and The Squeaky Wheel, which recaps our final exam policy. A special treat is the Working from Home article written by a working mom here at Career Step, Amy Kendall. Finally, Speech Wreck and Layman’s Medical Dictionary are included for your giggling pleasure.

As always, we look forward to knowing you better and helping you with any questions or concerns as you work through your program. As the autumn winds kick up and get a little chillier, we hope you can find a moment to take a break and grab a cuppa something warm and yummy and enjoy this issue of Stepping Up. Let us know what you think!

Thanks for reading!

- Jill McNitt, Editor

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**Professionalism & Expectations**

**Realistic Expectations Win the Job Search Gold!**

Who is the fastest man on Earth? In which sports will the United States take first? Will the record for the most gold medals won in an Olympics be broken this year? Questions like these and inspiring stories of triumph captivate audiences around the world every four years. Every Olympian has a long story of hard work, determination, and, in some cases, heartache from a career ending injury or unmet expectations. While injuries are often out of their control, there are certain precautions an Olympic athlete can take to prevent the particularly bitter kind of heartache that stems from unmet expectations.

Every Olympic athlete must set realistic expectations for themselves—many beginning in childhood. Athletes cannot expect to become Olympians without putting in long, grueling hours of training. Those who make it to the Olympics expect to spend the majority of their time preparing to do so. They know the time, training, and effort they put into their training will not be easy, but it will help them meet their future goals. Much like an Olympian, you have a future goal to achieve employment as an MT and you are training hard to do so, but your efforts will need to continue much further than the point of passing the final exam. Now is the time, as a student, to set your job search expectations. After you complete your training, what can you realistically expect from your job search?

First and foremost, you must remember that a job will not come to you. A chance to compete in the Olympics never came to anyone who sat at home watching and just waiting for the opportunity to fall into their lap. Instead of swimming laps or lifting weights, your training will include building an industry targeted resume, practicing for pre-employment exams, networking, and learning how to interview well. Like training for the Olympics, this preparation is not easy and does not happen overnight. Thus, you can realistically expect your job search to be a job in and of itself.

Once you have accepted a position, what can you realistically expect from your first medical transcription job? Like any new field, there will be a transition period. Just like most Olympians don’t win a gold medal at their first games, you will probably not achieve 100% accuracy and 200 lph your first day on the job. Please be patient with yourself! Most com-

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**Continued on pg. 3**
companies will have an excellent QA team to help support you throughout this transition. Pay attention to the feedback from these additional coaches and learn how to implement their suggestions for improvement. Just as an athlete might get frustrated being told over and over again to improve on the same thing, you may not always like what the QA team has to tell you. Remember—your coaches and your QA team are always there to help and they have your best interests in mind. They are trying to help you become the best you can be!

In addition to realistic expectations of your potential, enter the industry with realistic expectations of the amount of time it will take and the amount of money you can make. No athlete begins their career training only part-time, and you can expect the same in your MT career—to begin working full-time. Most companies prefer their entry-level graduates to begin working full-time so they can get up to speed at a faster rate. Remember, more training equals more improvement. Medical transcription is not just a hobby or something to fill your spare time; medical transcription is your new career! In regards to money, it generally takes an athlete several years of training and excellent performance to obtain sponsorship, which leads to increased salary. Likewise, it takes training and performance to raise your salary in the medical transcription industry. Starting any new industry is difficult—and medical transcription is no different. As you will be starting out in an entry-level position, you will make less money in your first year than you will in the future. Remember—your pay is productivity based. This means, like sponsorship, the better your performance, the higher your pay.

Approaching your job search with realistic expectations will help you avoid the unwanted heartache that can follow unmet expectations. Set high goals and work your hardest, but make sure you have a clear understanding of the industry and what to expect. After graduating from the program, you have the training you need to succeed! Keep this in mind, continue your preparations, and go for the gold!

- Alison Stapley
CS Graduate Support Team

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Dear Susan…

Your frustration is very normal, and it does seem that the obvious answer is to confront the doctors; however an MT who angrily dresses down the doctor is taking a big risk. What can you do?

First, realize that doctors are the cash cow of the clinic or hospital, and are under pressure to see as many patients as possible. Dictation is often viewed as a necessary annoyance—something to get out of the way as quickly as possible. They often dictate the same procedures over and over again, so it’s repetitious—often chunks of dictated material are memorized, so they can zip right through it! This is tough at first, but after that you know what the doctor usually says, you can just put it in your expander and you’re off!

Next, your ability to understand medical dictation will increase with experience. Time and repeated exposure will develop your listening skills to the point that these doctors at the beginning of Clinic Notes will seem easy! It is hard to understand these reports right now, but a seasoned MT would be able to understand and transcribe of them without difficulty.

Everyone’s listening skills progress at an individual rate. Take note of a couple of reports that seem very difficult to understand right now, and after you’re well into Basic Acute Care notes, return to them. I guarantee they’ll seem easy, and this shows your skills are growing!

Finally, please recognize you have just begun the practicum and you can’t expect to have it all down pat. Approach each report as a learning opportunity, not as a test of abilities you should already have. If you allow yourself permission to learn, your skills will grow. Be patient, and it will happen!

Sincerely,

- Susan Tuckett, CMT
CS Student Support Team
I don’t know about you, but as a full-time working mom my first impulse when I’m home is to get stuff done. “Get stuff done” includes everything from cleaning up the kitchen (which usually still looks like a disaster from getting everyone fed the night before) to folding the laundry (which has probably been sitting in the chair at the foot of my bed since I pulled it out of the dryer on Saturday) to getting the baby to take a nap so I can have two seconds to rummage in the fridge for lunch, but as a full-time work-at-home mom most of that “stuff” I would like to get done while I’m home has to wait—and forcing it to the side takes some serious skills (if I do say so myself).

Working at home has an unmistakable glamour about it. Almost everyone is convinced they would be so much happier and life would be so much easier if only they could work at home, but the dirty little secret about working at home is that it can be downright difficult—especially if you’re new at it! Though I’m no expert (you did, after all, just get a peek at the state of my kitchen and laundry), I’ve pulled together a few strategies that work for me—and hopefully they can help you make the most of your work-at-home situation too!

**Practice Makes Perfect**

Even if you haven’t already landed a work-at-home job, these strategies will help you be more effective as you’re studying at home too. Treat your schoolwork like a job, and by the time you’re ready to start working you’ll already have the habits in place to make the transition as smooth as possible.

It’s also important to remember that, just like any other learned skill, you may not be great at working or studying at home right off the bat. Remember—this is a skill set that you’re developing, and with enough patience and practice you can find the groove that works best for you and your family.

**Develop a Schedule**

Contrary to popular belief, working at home does not give you the freedom to lounge on the couch and leisurely get your work done during the commercial breaks of your favorite daytime soap. In fact, when you’re working from home it’s just as important (maybe even more so) to have a work schedule as it is when you’re working on site.

Whether your employer assigns your work-at-home schedule or you create one yourself, scheduling designated work time is key to maximizing your productivity. A work schedule sets limits so that next time you’re tempted to throw in a load of laundry, chat with the friend who just called, or really, do anything other than work, it’s easy to sit back and say, “Wait a minute. I’m working right now. I’ll do [insert activity] when I’ve finished or can take a break.” So schedule your work time, and stick to it.

Continued on pg. 5
Find a Workspace

When I first started working at home, I just set up camp on my dining room table. That didn’t last too long. Right about when I was getting depressed from the daily struggle of working while trying to ignore the dishes and never escaping the feeling that I should be working because of the mess, my husband suggested we set up a designated workspace for me.

Having a specific spot to keep my laptop, all of my papers/scribbles, and everything else that comes with my job not only contains the mess, but it also helps me focus. It’s much easier to block out the day-to-day responsibilities of my house and family and just concentrate on getting my work done in my little “office” (and don’t think you need a separate room to have an office… mine is a tiny table with a filing cabinet next to it in a corner of our basement.)

Set Daily Goals

When I realized I was working an extra hour to hour and a half every night (and my husband started jokingly referring to me as “the workaholic”) because I was trying to get EVERYTHING done before I signed off for the night, I started setting daily goals. Every day before I start working I ask myself what I need to get accomplished that day. I choose a couple projects I think will fill my time and tell myself that when I’m done with those projects I can be done for the day. (Of course, if you’re an hourly employee your strategy may be a little different, but setting goals will still help you focus on getting the most important things done first.)

I love my daily goals because I’ve been able to eliminate the guilty I-should-be-working feeling that used to stick around and I’ve actually become more productive because I’m more focused on what needs to get done.

All of these strategies come back to focus. Working at home can be so difficult precisely because there are so many other things vying for our attention. The trick is finding ways to block out all of those other distractions for a little while. Whether you use these strategies or develop your own, it all revolves around finding ways to maintain your focus.

- Amy Kendall
CS Marketing Team

Finders Keepers

Ophthalmology

Sometimes the shortest reports are anything but the sweetest, especially if they are chock full of specialty terminology, abbreviations, and symbols. Nevermind a thick accent, even the clearest dictator can be a real headache if they are dictating, say, an ophthalmology report!

A short ophthalmology report may sound similar to this: “Right eye minus two-hundred minus twenty-five axis twenty-nine O S minus two fifty minus seventy-five axis eighteen add two seventy-five sees twenty forty with right eye twenty seventy with left.”

Unless you know how to transcribe all those numbers, the audio for this report might represent 8 seconds that you’d rather spend on the back of a bucking bull. Let’s pick this report apart so that the bucking bull doesn’t look so appealing.

First, it’s important to know that refraction and axis measurements are often dictated in one sentence after each designated eye. In the above example, these measurements for the right eye are represented by the dictation “minus two-hundred minus twenty-five axis twenty-nine.”

Second, it’s important to know that these numbers are not all transcribed the same way; namely, the refraction measurements are transcribed differently than the axis measurement. This is because they are measured in different units. Refraction is measured in diopters, while axis is measured in degrees. Further, there are two refraction measurements for each eye, spherical and cylindrical, but only one axis measurement. Refraction measurements are transcribed (and handwritten on the actual prescription) as decimals, so two-hundred and twenty-five would be transcribed as 2.00 and 0.25. Note that the refraction is always 3-digits in length; you may need to add leading or trailing zeros to accomplish this. On the other hand, the axis is transcribed the way it sounds: twenty-nine is simply 29.

Third, the add value indicates bifocal power (if bifocal lenses are needed). It is expressed as a 3-digit decimal and is always a + value, even if plus is not dictated. Add should be transcribed in lowercase letters since it is not an abbreviation, and the single value applies to both eyes, which is why it is often dictated after the individual eye values.

Fourth, visual acuity—or in this report, what the person “sees”—is expressed as a fraction and tested using the Snellen eye chart. It indicates the distance a person needs to be at in order to see clearly what they ideally
I am looking at purchasing a new computer and cannot decide on whether to buy a laptop or desktop to suit me better for MT. I worry that the laptop may not be as comfortable for the many hours I will be sitting at the computer but I like the portability of the laptop. I have always had a desktop but again I feel the future is with the laptops. Any opinions? TIA

I am using a laptop with a docking station. This allows me to use any peripherals I like, but mainly my ergonomic keyboard in proper position. I don’t even THINK about using a laptop keyboard.) With its large, high-resolution screen, it gives away almost nothing in usability to a desktop.

I have all the amenities of a desktop and portability as well.

It’s my first portable (I have several other PCs as well). My brother, who helped me make the decision, says he has had nothing but a laptop for several years and has ‘never looked back.’ I’m beginning to understand why. I wholeheartedly recommend a laptop.

I personally use both! I have a young child at home, so as I go through the training, many times I am doing it on my laptop so that I can be in the living room with her. I also recently bought a desktop, definitely more powerful then I need as an MT but LOL. I switch to the desktop when I have to do long transcribing, and use the desktop at night when the baby is asleep. As for using the laptop as an actual MT IDK, I type just as well on my laptop as on my desktop. I think it’s probably a personal decision.

What sort of docking station do you use? I’ve begun to investigate those. I use a large monitor, standard keyboard, and a wireless mouse when I transcribe. I get tired of hooking up all the peripherals each time and then unhooking them so I can surf the Internet in comfort on the couch.

So far, I’ve been really interested in the Belkin universal docking station. It has 5 USB ports, which is one more than my laptop alone has. That would be very nice as then I can sync up my Blackberry or iPod while transcoding. (I’m too impatient to not multi-task!)

I’ve been using a Targus ACP45US, a low-end universal docking station, because it has PS-2 ports for my old keyboard, and it’s small. (Remember, I bought two, one to travel with.) They have a newer one that is all USB. They retail for $99-$179. I got mine as refurbished from Micro Center for about $20. I love it because I leave my Ethernet, mouse, keyboard, and speakers attached. I just disconnect the DS and foot pedal and I’m ready to go.

I know that with my ergonomic keyboard I do not have as much wrist pain as with my laptop keyboard. I also know that I can type faster on an ergonomic, which means MONEY! So consider if you have weak wrists (which women have weaker wrists than men) and then maybe go test drive a laptop somewhere and see if you like typing on it. (Although from personal experience, go with the bigger screens in laptops. It is worth it!)

I work from two different places, so I need to be using a laptop. I do bring my Microsoft ergonomic wave keyboard and my trackball mouse with me to use with the laptop. There is no way I can type on the laptop keyboard without errors and marked pain.

I will be getting a desktop machine, soon. I plan on this being my main work computer. But I will keep using the laptop when I travel.

I work on my laptop and love it. I have a corner desk with an unusually deep keyboard shelf, so I’m able to rest my laptop on this shelf, thus ensuring that the keyboard is at the correct height for typing. That, I believe, is a key factor. Also, I need to use the glide pad b/c every mouse on the market gives me wrist pain within a very short time, and the fact that my hands never leave the keyboard even for mouse-clicks keeps me efficient. And as a bonus, having an LCD screen reduces flicker, thus reducing eyestrain, and having it in a position where I’m slightly looking downwards not only reduces eye strain (b/c the lid is partly lowered over the eye, keeping it moist) but also reduces neck/shoulder strain for me.

I work on my laptop and love it. I have a corner desk with an unusually deep keyboard shelf, so I’m able to rest my laptop on this shelf, thus ensuring that the keyboard is at the correct height for typing. That, I believe, is a key factor. And as a bonus, having an LCD screen reduces flicker, thus reducing eyestrain, and having it in a position where I’m slightly looking downwards not only reduces eye strain (b/c the lid is partly lowered over the eye, keeping it moist) but also reduces neck/shoulder strain for me.

One of the most important pieces of equipment that a transcriptionist owns is their computer. A great debate exists surrounding whether a laptop or a desktop is best for transcribing. Below are some recommendations from working medical transcriptionists and current students.
should be able to see at 20 feet. This particular patient sees 20/40 with his right eye, which means that he must be at a distance of 20 feet to see clearly what someone with perfect visual acuity would be able to see clearly at 40 feet.

Finally, there are a few unusual guidelines when transcribing ophthalmology reports. You have likely learned that it is never acceptable to transcribe a term dictated in full as an abbreviation. This is true 99% of the time. However, ophthalmology reports are the exception to this rule when OD, OS, and OU are used in the context of visual testing and measurements. Therefore, in the example we’ve been working with, rather than change OS to left eye, as you are likely inclined to do, change right eye to OD. (You would not change right eye to OD if it was used as a general reference, such as, “Patient has pain in his right eye,” which should be transcribed exactly as dictated.)

When accompanied by a value, plus and minus should be transcribed as symbols (+ and -) rather than spelled out.

It is acceptable to transcribe axis as a word, but it is preferable to transcribe it as x, leaving a space between x and its value.

Putting all of this information together, you can now confidently transcribe this report!

OD -2.00 -0.25 x 29. OS -2.50 -0.75 x 18. Add +2.75. Sees 20/40 with right eye, 20/70 with left.

- Heather Garrett
CS Skills Assessment Team

Graduate Spotlight
Lori Ward

I am and always have been a North Carolina girl, although I’ve inhabited different areas across the state. I currently live near the coast with my husband and our two dogs.

Prior to my current MT job, the most fulfilling job I’d ever had was hospital administrative assistant over 10 years ago. It was a way to make a behind-the-scenes difference for people when they needed help—even unseen help. I’m not equipped to be a hands-on healthcare provider, but the administrative aspect of healthcare was perfect for me.

Then I got married, and in my case, marriage necessitated moving across state. I found a challenging enough job, but it was not very fulfilling; however, it paid well and had a jeans-and-tees dress code that spoiled me, so there I stayed until February 2011 when we again moved due to my husband’s job relocation.

I wasn’t as lucky with my job search this time. We moved to Ernul, NC (yes, you read that right). The larger town of New Bern is nearby, but I struggled to obtain interviews.

Six unemployed months later, at a family gathering, I overheard my cousin-in-law, Jennifer, discussing her at-home MT job. I had considered medical transcription before but had always been intimidated trying to distinguish scams from legitimate opportunities. Jennifer provided a guidepost through all that and steered me to the Career Step website.

I started Career Step around September 2011 and worked a 30-hour-per-week schedule on the course. Some days were tougher than others, but I reminded myself the same would be true in a traditional workplace. I graduated with honors in April 2012, then retook the exam to achieve high honors in May.

After graduation, the job search unnerved me more than anticipated. I wanted not just any job but a job that suited me. I spent close to a month applying and testing with no luck.

Then I got an e-mail from Graduate Services that Medical Transcription Associates, Inc. (MTA), in Virginia was accepting applications from high honors grads. I searched the forums and determined MTA likely to be a good fit for me. By the end of my initial interview, MTA was number one on my wish list.

I accepted IC status with MTA in late May and couldn’t be happier. (Well, I could be faster, and that would make me happier. I’m working on that!) I even love my proofreaders. Being instructive and constructive without seeming critical must be difficult, especially via email, but everyone I’ve encountered at MTA excels at that. No one ever seems too busy to help. I’m sure there are times they must be, but they always take the time.

My path to an MT career wasn’t straightforward, but in the end I got exactly what I wanted. I’m employed by a company I enjoy, so I can vouch that it is possible. All that, and a jeans-and-tees dress code too!

- Lori Ward
A key to overcoming paralysis may be to use a template to help give a framework to your thoughts, and you can create this yourself by simply writing down what you want to say, in a rough draft. This captures your message and provides a starting point. A lot of business communication happens via email, which allows you to edit and polish your message before you send it. This can alleviate anxiety and is also effective when preparing for a phone call or verbal meeting. Of course, it’s important to send the message within an effective timeframe.

**Flowery or jargon-filled language.** Sometimes we lapse into extra-fancy language to appear knowledgeable, but this can come across as stiff, artificial, or pompous instead. For example:

**Dear Boss:** I wish to convey to you that I ascertained that the production for the purpose of the city’s usage has increased due to the fact that the new tool with regard to and for the purpose of typewriter maintenance is working. (43 words)

Strip it down and simplify. You can more effectively say the same thing with 26 fewer words, and you won’t come off sounding, well…ridiculous:

**Dear Boss:** The production for the city has increased because the new typewriter maintenance tool is working. (17 words)

Avoid acronyms unless they are well understood by your audience. Acronyms are common and don’t impress your boss, and an attempt to use them to impress others is AABC (absolute and annoying complete baloney). For example:

**Dear Client:** MTTEST accessed AAC in V5 from the RDB and is incompatible with IE9.

Say what? This may make sense around the boardroom table with the Skills Assessment team, but to a client without an intimate knowledge of the company’s inner workings and language, it’s just a bunch of gobbledygook. It takes a few more words to foster understanding, but it’s much friendlier to say this instead:

**Dear Client:** The testing platform pulled the needed program content from the database; this testing platform is incompatible with Internet Explorer 9.

**Not getting to the point.** Sometimes we dance around an uncomfortable issue by using a lot of “softening” words or keep ourselves safe by apologizing a lot. We may adopt a passive voice in an attempt to distance ourselves from the issue; this way, if it’s not well received, we don’t appear to own it. It’s a self-protective tactic that can result in muddying the message because, instead of pleasing the audience with our respect, we require them to wade through apologetic tangents to dig for the message, which is annoying. For example:

**Dear Boss:** I’m sorry to bother you because I know you’re very busy and may not have time to review this right away. I need to ask you for time off on Labor Day weekend. I know this is next week, I realize, and this is probably too short of notice, so I totally understand that I might not get to do this. I know it is already being taken off by a lot of people already, but my family is putting pressure on me to ask for the time because they have planned a family reunion. It’s completely up to you, and I am happy to work instead if you feel that would be best.

This person simply needs Labor Day off for a family activity, and he’s afraid he’s waited too long to put in a time-off request. Some supervisors might feel a tug at their heartstrings or get a charge from the groveling, but most will simply read the request a couple of times to make sure of the message and then take a look at the calendar to see if he can be spared and if he has time-off hours accrued, all the while making a mental note of the lack of self-confidence oozing from the message. Something like this is more direct and better:

**Dear Boss—Please consider my request for time off on the Friday before the Labor Day weekend.**

It’s as simple as that.

**Guerilla tactics.** This happens when a frustrating situation becomes too much to bear and a flare of anger drives you to dial your supervisor’s number or march into her office in a huff, where you unload the latest details while looking at the ceiling and hyperventilating. Your account comes out in an emotional, disorganized jumble, but the troubled look on your supervisor’s face seems to validate your feelings. In retrospect you might realize, however, that her face showed an expression of pain caused by trying to make organized sense of your barrage.

Abruptly launching into a problem without providing the needed background information requires a lot of backtracking and followup questioning to correctly understand the situation. After unraveling the information and offering solution options, the strongest impression your supervisor has of the situation is how unpleasant it is to work with you.

How do you manage this? It’s normal to feel upset at times, and work situations often force us to tackle challenges and work with others in ways we don’t prefer, but it’s never okay to make others deal with you because you lost your cool at work. When you feel upset, take a deep breath and count to a million; take a walk, take a break, take yourself away from the situation for a little while so you can cool down. Don’t succumb to the temptation to speak harshly, especially if raised voices or tears are threatening. Instead, write down your thoughts to make sure you’re thinking logically (if you’re writing them down in an email DO NOT hit send until you’ve cooled down and had a chance to review your message in a calmer frame of mind). When you regain your composure, ask...
Continued from pg. 8 - Communication

your supervisor for some time with
the office door closed so you can speak
calmly and effectively. You’ll make a
lot more progress this way, and your
supervisor will appreciate your ratio-
nal approach.

Forgetting the niceties and real-
ities. Business and professional com-
unication is more formal than every-
day conversation. When sending an
email to a coworker, it’s a good policy
to include a greeting and a signature
as well as use correct grammar, punc-
tuation, and spelling. When sending
an email to a supervisor, these things
are an absolute necessity.

Keep in mind that any written
communication can be saved and/or
shared, so don’t put anything in an
e-mail to your coworker that you would
be embarrassed for your supervisor
or anyone else to read. Even instant
messaging systems, while more infor-
mal, maintain a record of what occurs
there. Unprofessional conversations
con can be retrieved and reviewed, to the
detriment of those involved. I know
of a couple of cases where instant
message conversations contributed to
the firing of an employee. It’s impor-
tant to remember that all communi-
cation portals at work are essentially
public—not private. Keep it clean,
keep it on task, and keep it courteous!

Another aspect of politeness is
to respect others’ time. Realize your
coworkers and supervisors are also
working and your message may pull
them off task. Check to see you ap-
proach them at an appropriate time,
or make an appointment, especially if
you will need more than a few minutes.
I once knew an employee who began
speaking as he walked toward his su-
pervisor’s door to find his boss on the
phone; instead of realizing it wasn’t a
good time and politely moving on, this
employee plopped down in a chair and
eavesdropped on a private conversa-
tion until his boss put the phone on
hold and asked him to come back in a
few minutes! The employee probably
felt he was simply focused on his issue
and could argue that his boss’s door
was open, he wasn’t listening to the
conversation, etc., but the upshot was
that his actions were disrespectful and
demanding and the situation could
have been avoided with a little more
awareness and sensitivity. Be patient.

Being too personal. “Keeping
things professional” essentially means
taking the personal aspects out of a
situation and dealing logically with
the facts. As a competent and reliable
employee, this shows in your commu-
ication style.

A more impersonal voice is espe-
cially important for those who repre-
sent a company to others. There is
no place for the mention of personal
circumstances or internal company
problems as excuses to clients or cus-
tomers—even if these are the actual
reasons. In this role, it’s your job to
provide a professional face to the com-
pany you work for. Instead of citing
your broken alarm clock or a fight with
your spouse as reasons for missing a
meeting where you were to represent
your employer, offer a simple but sin-
cere apology and move forward, focus-
ing on any positive aspects and what
to do next. Don’t detail confusion or
failure in your department as a reason
for a delay. Internal scrambling often
results in valuable learning, but skip
the play-by-play and use the outcome
to respond with confidence and a plan
for the next step. Telling an angry
client he failed to understand some-
thing and caused his own problem is
always counterproductive; leave out
the blaming; no matter how justified
it may be, and provide a concrete solu-
tion instead.

It’s been suggested that commu-
nication is 20% content and 80% tone
of voice. Professional communication
is all about establishing an appropriate
tone. No one enjoys confrontation, but
with the proper word choices and pro-
fessional tone, nearly any subject can
be effectively handled without offense
or escalation. Fortunately, most work-
place interaction is pleasant, brief, and
non-threatening, and a businesslike
approach helps maintain a positive
and productive atmosphere that ben-
efits everyone.

- Jill McNitt
CS Student Support Team

A Grader’s Perspective

Keys to Successful Employment Testing

Employment testing involves
more than the actual test, so
let’s steer away from the dictation
and transcription for just a moment
to address your testing profile, something
that, perhaps unbeknownst to you,
exists and makes a big impression.

When you create a user ID for a
testing site, your information is au-
tomatically generated into a profile.
Your entire profile is viewable by the
potential employer and any hiring
services they might use. With this in
mind, give consideration to the fol-
lowing information in your profile.

Password: You might think that
your password is super-secret and
only known by you. Wrong! It’s listed
in your profile right along with your
name, address, and phone number. Do
not think of your password as an op-
portunity to cuss in private or to vent

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The Squeaky Wheel
Better Assessment Means Better Preparation

At the beginning of the year, Career Step began providing final exam scores to test takers instead of the full text of the graded final exam results. The decision to change the way we provide final exam results came about naturally, as part of our standard updating and improvement process.

The policy change was a departure from how we’d handled final exam results up to that point, which meant we fielded many questions about it. Some were upset with the change, others were curious, and still others simply took it in stride. Here are the three most commonly asked questions and our answers:

Why did you change the way exam results are given?

It boiled down to two things: we need to maintain the integrity of the final exam content, and we want to provide a testing experience that more closely resembles employment tests.

The MT5 and MT6 programs are older medical transcription programs. We no longer directly enroll new students in either of these programs, and we have not for quite awhile. Both these programs exist on an older platform that requires the final exam to be accessed on a site separate from the course.

The final exam testing process associated with these programs is a recognized security problem because the exam reports are downloaded onto the tester’s computer. Once the exam reports are on someone’s computer, they can be freely shared—and they have been shared. Many, many times we found final exam content posted on the internet, forcing us to replace exam content and police cheating behavior. Providing access to the graded content of the final exam reports also resulted in graded reports being posted to the internet, which only compounded this problem.*

The MT7 and MTE programs are newer and exist on our current platform, which provides an improved test-taking experience by being more representative of what employers offer during the job search. This includes the provision of test scores only—just like employment test results. The final exam now serves as a learning experience by treating a test taker just as they’d be treated when taking an employment test. This new policy also preserves the integrity of the exam by limiting its exposure.

Another nice feature of the current platform is that the final exams exist simply as the last part of each program instead of on a separate site. This eliminates the need to schedule the exam with two business days’ lead time, and students in these programs can simply begin the final exam whenever they are ready.

I thought the final exam was supposed to be a learning experience. How can I learn if I don’t see my mistakes?

The program is long and thorough, and it provides many, many opportunities for feedback and learning. The final exam is not intended to be a learning experience in terms of content, like the optional assessments or the reports in the practicum, but rather as preparation for pre-employment tests during your job search. When you take the final exam, the assumption is you have prepared as much as possible and you’re ready to be tested and scored.

When I was in school, I always got my tests back with correction marks. How do I know that my test was scored correctly?

Career Step has been training medical transcriptionists for over 20 years, and we have an excellent reputation in the industry for producing well-prepared entry-level MTs. Part of the reason we have lasted so long and earned the respect of MTSOs is because of our very effective testing protocol. The final exam grading team is highly qualified and extremely familiar with the final exam; they can be trusted to provide an accurate assessment.

Please keep in mind that most testing experiences in today’s educational world are automated; receiving only a score is simply the expected norm on most college campuses as well as testing centers for professional credentials and licensing. The employment exams for MTSOs also only provide a score at the end, nothing more. The new policy helps you make the transition to this expectation so you’ll do well on the other side of graduation.

We believe that better assessment means better preparation, which leads to better success after graduation. We are very aware of the changing nature of the industry you’re preparing for with our medical transcription training, and we are always looking for ways to better prepare you for the current working environment. We are dedicated to your success because your success becomes our reputation, which means we’re in this together. That’s the way it’s always been. Thank you for your support and confidence! ■

- CS Skills Assessment Team

* Of course, we are very aware of this possibility and regularly search the internet for final exam content. In addition, each exam is carefully cross checked, and, if cheating is detected, the current exam and any remaining exam attempts are forfeit.
Continued from pg. 9 - Grader’s...

your hatred for something. The best password is one that is meaningless to others but easy for you to remember. This might be something like a combination of your pets’ initials and your birthday. Example: gmb11678.

Email: Even a G-rated email address can offer the wrong impression of who you really are. Your friends might think it’s cute and your sister might think it’s true, but a potential employer might worry that you’ll be a difficult person to deal with if you bear the address princessalwaysgets-scherway@hotmail.com. If you’re going to use a descriptive email address, make sure it is one that won’t paint the wrong picture. Better yet, set up an email address to use strictly for business and employment communication, and keep your address limited to something neutral, like your name accompanied by your favorite number. Example: jane.doe7@hotmail.com.

Name and Address: There really shouldn’t be anything that needs to be said about your name and address, but there is: use CoRrEcT CAPITALIZATION. Use a capital letter to start your first and last names. Use a capital letter to start the name of the city you reside in. Use a capital letter to start each word in the name of your street. You know the rules—use them! Failure to do something as simple as using a capital letter to start a proper noun just shouts, “Lazy!”

Now let’s address a few points about your actual test that can destroy your chances of receiving a job offer.

Preparation: Do not sign up for an employment test if you are not equipped to follow through. You should have working speakers or headset and a working foot pedal or familiarity with using hot keys. There should never be a reason to omit transcribing the test reports and submitting a personal note instead that states you do not have a foot pedal but would like to finish the test some day when you do or your speakers are broken but when you get a new computer you’d like to take the test. If you’re not ready to complete an employment test, you are not ready to work. If you are not ready to work, do not apply.

Difficulty: Some employment tests will contain reports that seem next to impossible to transcribe if you do not have a couple years of experience under your belt. These difficult reports can serve several purposes, such as weeding out those who will give up easily and identifying those with the required skills and abilities for a particular account. The practical portion of employment tests is not multiple-choice. In other words, you do not get to choose which reports you will or will not transcribe. Do not try to avoid difficult reports by saying the dictator is too difficult but you’d be artificially willing by leaving a note that the dictator is too difficult but you’d be happy to transcribe a different report instead, which is just a fancy way of saying you are not ready to be hired for the position. Finally, never leave a nastygram to vent your displeasure of who you really are. Your friends might think it’s true, but a potential employer might worry that you’ll be a difficult person to deal with if you bear the address princessalwaysgets-scherway@hotmail.com. If you’re going to use a descriptive email address, make sure it is one that won’t paint the wrong picture. Better yet, set up an email address to use strictly for business and employment communication, and keep your address limited to something neutral, like your name accompanied by your favorite number. Example: jane.doe7@hotmail.com.

Completion: Be aware of the length of time you take to submit a test report. Employers do not want you to rush through the reports and make careless errors as a result, but taking more than 48 hours to submit a test might leave the employer wondering if you even want a job.

Purpose: Employment tests are not for extra practice and companies do not owe you any feedback on your errors; that is what schooling is for. Career Step is a respected school in the industry because their graduates are prepared to work as MTs before they test with companies. If you are lacking the skills needed to successfully pass employment tests, you need to take advantage of another attempt at the final exam, submit any assessment tests you skipped over, and redo any course reports you had difficulty with. This might require purchasing a course extension and taking a step back from the employment search, but the responsibility to become adequately qualified for a job rests on your shoulders, not theirs. Additionally, many companies only allow MTs to test, on average, once every 6 months. If you use employment tests simply as opportunities to transcribe more reports, you will run out of opportunities. When you’re finally ready to search for a job, you won’t have any companies left to test with.

Well, fellow MTs, that’s my two cents’ worth for this issue. Actually, if paid 7 cents per 65-character line including spaces, it would be six dollars’ worth. Until next time, happy transcribing!

- Heather Garrett
CS Skills Assessment Team

Don’t forget to join the Career Step facebook page! Just search for Career Step from your personal page and click Like to join. The more the merrier!

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Speech Wreck

Speech Wreck by Heather Garrett

SR: Head and neck exam reveals feet in the nostrils.
D: Head and neck exam reveals patent nostrils.